

# Rapidly Deploying Vaccination Call Center for Lawrence General Hospital

## Background and Challenge

Lawrence, Massachusetts, home to 80,000 residents, is an under-resourced minority-majority city in northeast Massachusetts approximately 30 miles north of Boston. Lawrence's population is heavily concentrated within its seven square miles. Its COVID-19 rates placed it in the red zone as one of the top five most affected cities in the state. This status heavily impacted the city and Lawrence General Hospital, a private, non-profit community hospital and one of a handful of safety net hospitals in the state.

In response to this emergent situation, the Massachusetts Department of Public Health identified Lawrence General as a "super center" for the distribution of COVID-19 vaccines to the region. The hospital needed to quickly develop infrastructure and capabilities, and obtain resources to meet these demands. In accordance with state guidelines, it would initially vaccinate first responders, healthcare workers, and other vulnerable groups, and would need to quickly ramp up to serve the vaccination needs of the general public.

Lawrence General's administration assembled an implementation team to oversee development of a robust call center to support a general public with unique needs involving low income, aging population, many of whom are non-English speaking. Low computer literacy levels complicated plans for a high-tech approach. Vital to success of the rollout were walk-in access and the ability to schedule appointments over the phone. More importantly, they needed an immediate solution to a pressing and potentially deadly threat.

Realizing this was a larger endeavor than the hospital could manage with limited in-house resources, Lawrence General sought a consulting partner with experience with its existing electronic medical record system, MEDITECH, to avoid a lengthy learning curve. They were looking for a partner willing and able to stand up and run a virtual call center in an extremely short two- to three-week timeframe, and find solutions to ramp up capacity, including coordinating patient preregistration (estimated at 10-15 minutes per person).



### Acute Care Non-Profit Community Hospital

- **Beds:** 189
- **About:** Serving the region since 1875
- Recipient of prestigious Gold Seal of Approval from The Joint Commission



We knew there would be volume beyond our capacity and a lot of demand. We needed professional call center phone support ASAP. But the biggest thing we needed was a partner who could pivot with us. Selecting this team was the right choice and we wouldn't have been able to do this without them. We chose them because of their reputation in the industry. But we quickly found out we had established a trusted partnership based on their flexibility, commitment, and speed to adapt to our ever-changing needs.

—Melissa Carroll, PT, DPT Director of Ambulatory and Rehab Services

## The Results

**30%**

increase in data entry transaction efficiency

**1,000**

patient calls answered per day for vaccination, pre-registration and scheduling needs

**~20,000**

calls answered during the first two months of opening the call center

**<3 weeks**

to set-up the virtual call-center from idea to operating

## The Solution

The goal of vaccinating the general public was clear, but the mechanisms for doing so were not, due to the rapidly changing nature of vaccine supply, distribution, and administration. Lawrence General immediately found a comfort level with Tegria's team and our willingness and ability to work through complex, time-sensitive projects. Over the course of two weeks and nearly a dozen increasingly refined scopes of work, we reached an agreement, and only two weeks later, the call center was operational.

One of our team executives shared, "When we went into this, we knew it wasn't a typical project. This was an opportunity to do something for the greater good, and we were really happy about it. All of our team members appreciated the opportunity to work with Lawrence General." Another executive added, "We started this engagement on blind faith. We made the investment in the call center knowing the project could come to a halt at any time. We were fine with pivoting on a moment's notice because we wanted to support Lawrence General's mission. That's the way we operate as a partner. We figure out challenges together and remain flexible."

The virtual call center was staffed by a team of ten agents, half of which were bilingual, to coordinate vaccine preregistration and scheduling. From the first day, the ten agents patiently managed tremendous

call volumes from eager and sometimes anxious callers. Call volumes frequently spiked as the Commonwealth of Massachusetts opened eligibility to specific demographic groups using a phased approach, often with short notice to the hospitals and the public.

The Lawrence General team was asked to change focus and reprioritize as often as daily, based on patient demographics, fluctuating volumes, availability of the vaccine, and other dynamics. Our team adapted with them, customizing the solution to fit the priorities of the day.

As the Commonwealth of Massachusetts struggled in its efforts to vaccinate residents statewide, Lawrence General set the standard for efficiently processing vaccinations for a large number of residents, and was widely recognized for doing so.

## Outcome

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Tegria helped Lawrence General manage nearly 1,000 calls per day and almost 20,000 calls during the first two months of call center operation. Further, the consulting team introduced custom software for distributed team data entry that served to increase transaction efficiency by more than 30 percent, improving the productivity of all team members.

The call center leveled the playing field by helping residents from lower-resource areas get access to appointments they couldn't obtain without a computer, which was particularly important for the population. The team's ability to stand up the call center in just two weeks resulted in many elderly patients receiving vaccinations a full month earlier than otherwise would have occurred. A clinical leader at Lawrence General expressed "this probably saved some lives."

Lawrence General's CEO, hospital administrators, and the local newspaper editor received letters and phone calls from residents citing the positive experience they had interacting with the call center. This experience was a meaningful event for the Lawrence General team, as well as for Tegria. Lawrence General is proud to have persevered through the pandemic and credits this partnership for helping pave the way to success.